

Corporate Cultural Strategy in Human Resource Management Practice: Indonesia Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the corporate culture strategic implemented by human resource manager to address those culture differences at the parent company, subsidiary company and individual. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with 8 HR managers in Indonesia. The corporate culture strategic include the degree of standardization of HR, industrial relationship, and geographic differences. To implement a corporate culture strategy in HR practice, the managers encourage stronger partnerships with the subsidiaries company, standardization of HRM practice, paying closer attention to changes in labor laws, cultural training and development, leadership development, and cultural awareness.

Keywords: Strategies, corporate culture, and human resources practices

Introduction

The executive's decision to acquire the company is a product synergy. The success of the acquisition seems to be related to how appropriate or culturally appropriate the two companies. Culture is an abstraction, but the power created in social and organizational situations comes from a strong culture (Schein, 2010). Hofstede (2010) describes four cultural manifestations, including: symbols (in the form of words, gestures, images, or objects that have meaning and shape a particular group's attitude); Hero (belief in the characteristics of people as a model of behavior); Ritual (collective activity to achieve desired goals and be considered socially important); and values (the tendency to choose the most preferred things to be mutual agreement). This explains that the corporate culture embraces the values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms of the company plays an important role in conducting best human resource management (HR) practices.

Successful acquisitions require a corporate culture strategy to internalize the parent company culture (the acquiring company) into a subsidiary (the acquired company). Schein (2010), Hofstede (2010), and Erez and Gati (2004) argue that the success of acquisitions in cultural contexts has three cultural categories: corporate culture, corporate sub-culture, and individual culture (individual employees).

In the realm of corporate culture, the company is still conducting trials to implement human resource management policies and practices (HR) while respecting the customs and traditions of its subsidiaries (Chen and Eldridge, 2010). Furthermore, human resource managers must understand labor regulations at both the regional and national levels (O'Sullivan, 2010; Posthuma et al., 2006). Managers working in subsidiaries (corporate sub-cultures) will have difficulty adjusting (Robbins and Judge, 2013). To address this, HR managers look for corporate culture strategies that make their organizations successful. Strategic corporate culture in the parent company is implemented to ensure that the organization embodies the values, goals and objectives supported by HR policies, procedures and practices (Brewster and Suutari, 2005; Labedz and Lee, 2011).

In the realm of corporate subculture, lack of knowledge of intercultural business ethics can injure corporate subcultures (Shapiro et al., 2008). Strategies on corporate subcultures, related to issues of trade union negotiations in subsidiaries (Millar and Choi, 2008). While, the domain of individual culture, there are many issues related to managers and employees of subsidiaries. For example, the lack of ability to understand the culture of a subsidiary, so that there can be miscommunication between employees of the head of the parent company and employees of a subsidiary due to geographical differences (Selmer, 2006). Individual cultural strategy, disseminates the vision and mission of the parent company to foster a

unified mindset of diversity among employees through the development of human resource competencies and business-related competencies beyond the geographic boundaries (Levy et al., 2007).

Based on the above discussion the main focus of this research is the corporate culture strategy in the practice of HR, with subfocus on the internalization of corporate culture, HR practice standardization, labor negotiations, and geographical differences. The purpose of this research is to understand corporate culture strategy in practice of HR in overcoming business competition. Our research can contribute to the development of HR practices by integrating the corporate culture on the parent structure, subsidiaries and individual culture of employees in responding to business challenges. For the purposes of this study, we designed a semi-structured interview question set, by interviewing 8 HR managers from various industries. The corporate culture strategy in the HR literature and organizational behavior focuses on the company's values, goals, and objectives in the face of business competition, a key task of HR managers in implementing the best HR practices for the company's sustainability. The results of Ngo and Loi (2008) suggest that the flexibility of employee behavior and the flexibility of HR practices have strong links with cultural adaptation.

In the parent structure, HR managers align HR policies and procedures with business objectives. The strategies implemented are knowledge of the limitations in standardization of HR policies and procedures across subsidiaries (Bjorkman and Budhwar, 2007; Dalton and Druker, 2012). Although there are several policies that can apply to all subsidiaries, it is difficult to execute corporate culture strategies in the parent structure of companies with subcultures of subsidiaries, due to local uniqueness (Levy et al., 2007)

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The corporate culture strategy of the parent company is diversity management, particularly with regards to managing the varying expectations of individuals in the workplace. Because, different individuals within the same organizational unit do not always respond the same MSDM practices in the company. Cultural differences can also lead to communication and conflict difficulties (Dalton and Druker, 2012; Das, 2010). Different communication styles between managers in the parent company and employees in subsidiaries can be a source of conflict in the workplace (Forstenlechner, 2010). According to Schein (2010), communication conflicts can be exacerbated by the context of people interacting. For example, Individual characteristics derived from a subsidiary culture with explicit and logical communication styles (communication style of North Sumatra). Conversely, people who come from the parent culture tend to

communicate with non-verbal style (Java communication style). Thus, leaders in the parent company need to have the knowledge, skills and abilities to manage the diversity of communication in the workplace in order to increase work productivity.

The subcultural strategy of the subsidiary structure lies in the effective facilitation of virtual teams. With the advent of communications technology, it is possible to coordinate meetings and share knowledge across regions (Kapoor, 2011). Although often considered a more efficient way of communicating, the use of virtual teams can be hampered by cultural differences (Graf et al., 2010). For example, the lack of physical contact can affect trust. (Elron and Viga-Gadot, 2006). In another study, Dekker et al. (2008) focuses on virtual teams using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, finding that team members' perceptions differ from one culture to another. In other instances, American team members (higher in individualism) do not involve all team members, only necessary to be involved, compared to Indonesia (higher in collectivism). Interestingly, the dimension of low power distance in the US means very little hierarchical difference, but for Indonesians from high power spaces, hierarchical differences are very subtle. In addition, a more masculine US culture can be translated that team members can take a firm leadership role. Finally, the culture of uncertainty of low uncertainty manifests as a more direct mode of Indonesian communication compared to America and India. Furthermore, misunderstandings of messages may arise as a result of the lack of visibility of non-verbal cues, which are important for high-context cultures (Hofstede, 2010).

Individual cultural strategies, individual employee structures include the selection of an appropriate manager, consideration of personnel issues, provision of training and intercultural development, attractive remuneration, performance and management appraisals, productive work relationships, talent management, and effective repatriation (Hofstede, 2010; Schein, 2010; Shapiro et al., 2008). In addition, there is recognition that family members who accompany the manager in charge of a subsidiary are an integral part of the manager's career success (Littrell et al., 2006). Thus, there is a need for HR managers to focus on managers' welfare in order to maximize the success of duties in subsidiaries. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that programs that utilize cultural theories (eg, integrating knowledge of different cultures, cultural training and cultural sensitivity) tend to better prepare managers for duties in subsidiaries.

The role of HR as a strategic business partner has gained wide recognition (Labedz and Lee, 2011; Pritchard, 2010). In this partnership, HR provides valuable and important services to organizations in various forms, such as talent management, skills and competence development, leadership development, change management, and knowledge management (Burbach and Royle, 2010; Hertog et al., 2010). The role of HR becomes important, as there is a need to ensure that every HR policy and practice contribute to corporate values (Boohene and Asuinura, 2011). Thus, the development of the human resources balance card as part of the business matrix is critical, so the strategic role played by HR can be assessed and the HR can utilize feedback for overall business improvement (Rhodesa et al., 2008). To achieve the role of strategic business partner, HR managers are expected to understand the mutual support role of subsidiary business (such as finance, marketing, and operations).

Associated with being a strategic business partner is the development of business-related competencies as part of personal HR. HR needs to understand business issues and contribute to change management through proactive participation (Hertog et al., 2010; Levy et al., 2007). One example is the development of superior customer service recognition through talent management in subsidiaries by working with the parent company's marketing department (Hughes and Rog, 2008). That is, HR must be knowledgeable about the business in order to serve customers well. Business-related competencies in HR can be developed through professional development practices such as job redesign work, work enrichment, and work rotation (Wood and Wall, 2007). As business grows, the development of culturally conscious competencies is essential for individual managers for the success of the organization (Graf and Mertesacker, 2009). Thus, there is a human resource requirement that has business skills and experience.

Another important role of HR managers is to harmonize the policies and procedures of the parent and subsidiary human resources. Given that environmental, socio-cultural, and regulatory differences can affect the standardization of HR policies and procedures. Therefore, HR managers must be flexible in

implementing HR policies and procedures with colleagues in subsidiaries (Almond, 2011; Björkman and Lervik, 2007; Pudelko, 2006). Pudelko and Harzing (2008) provide several examples to illustrate HR in subsidiaries. For example, instead of implementing a seniority-based reward system, such as in Japan, Canon adopted a performance-oriented strategy when operating in the United States. Furthermore, German producers have experience in dealing with unions, have chosen to gather in most of the non-unionized southern states. Kopp (2006) found that Japanese organizations tend to implement practices that ethnocentric staffing of organizations in America and Europe, consequently, face more problems with their international HRM. Thus, corporate culture strategies are in the form of best practices of MSDM, which have produced mixed results in providing a competitive advantage.

Research Methods

Method of collecting and analyzing data used in this research is qualitative. Discussing these challenges and strategies, the authors interviewed 8 senior HR managers in various industries in Indonesia. Table 1 presents a summary of the participants' backgrounds. Participants are selected from the author's personal contact. Two election conditions are national enterprise HR managers. Three quarters of participants from Jakarta. The manager works in various industries, including manufacturing, banking, financing, information technology, healthcare, food products, mining and pharmaceuticals. Permission for interview recordings for transcription purposes is given before beginning the interview.

Table 1 Participant Background Summary

Participant	Industry	City	
		Parent company	Subsidiaries
JWE	Manufacture	Sulawesi-Selatan	Jakarta
AST	Pharmacy	Jakarta	Nusa Tenggara Timur
BGH	Health	Jakarta	Papua-Barat
TDF	Banking	Jakarta	Kalimantan-Selatan
JKM	Information Technology	Jakarta	Maluku-Utara
SWD	Food product	Surabaya	Jakarta
HSL	Mining	Sumatera-Barat	Kalimantan
TTJ	Financing	Jakarta	Kalimantan-Utara

Interviews were conducted using interviewer criteria recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). These criteria include the knowledge of the theme in the interview, the arrangement of the interview to facilitate the interviewing process smoothly, ensuring that the questions are clear, taking into account the ethics of the interview (such as solving the first question before moving on to the next question and listening intently), being open Which is important to be interviewed.

On average, the interviews seized 45 minutes and the interview schedule was emailed to participants a week before the interview scheduling so participants had time to ponder the questions. Pseudonyms for individuals and organizations used in this study for reasons of confidentiality. Interviews consist of 6 open-ended questions. Questions relevant to this paper include national business strategies after the national financial crisis, the strategic implications faced by the HR division and the negotiation strategies employed. Interview structures used in semi open structured format, to enable unexpected and emerging themes. This methodology also allows follow-up and inquiry questions by clarifying key issues and also allows participants to freely express their grievances. This research is a qualitative study with open interviews, so that it can find a new conceptualization of human resource management practices (Welch et al., 2008).

Each interview is transcribed per word and analyzed with Nvivo software (version 8), widely used for organization and analysis of unstructured qualitative data. Bazeley and Jackson (2013) observe that Nvivo can provide more rigidity and traceability of manual coding and is useful for identifying emerging categories and themes. Given the usefulness of Nvivo in thematic analysis (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), this strategy is used to find words, phrases and phrases that form a common theme across all 8 cases.

Thus, a set of preliminary codes has been created (Miles et al., 2014) together with two main categories namely, strategy and corporate culture. This technique uses some free coding that can reduce the bias compared to using a single encoding (Miles et al., 2014), continuous discussions between codes and three iterations, interconnected relationships identified and grouped into two main components (ie strategy and corporate culture).

Results and Discussion

In the parent and subsidiary structures, the main strategy for managers is to achieve a balance between standardization of the parent and subsidiary. Some companies have attempted to adopt (standardize) HR policies and practices in subsidiaries. When an organization's policies and practices have served them well, there are strong reasons to defend them. However, managers recognize that standardization of HR policies and practices may not be feasible due to socio-cultural and political constraints and deliberate strategies by the parent company to enable subsidiaries to serve their stakeholders through a corporate subculture (local culture). Some have suggested that organizations should be interested in a set of best practices in HR, and the following two comments reflect this challenge in the corporate culture category:

“It's already a balance between the parent management coordination and implementation in the subsidiary, and you see the parent company that does not do it well”. (Interview JWE, 21/7/15)

“It is important to ensure that our subsidiaries understand the national interest as a whole, that is one of the biggest challenges in our organization” (Interview AST, 26/10/15)

The second strategy for the corporate culture category, HR managers interviewed relates to industrial relations. Given that different regions have different labor legislation, one manager mentioned that an important task for human resources is to “continue to follow different labor legislation in different areas.” Also, the roles played by unions and the structure of their influence in other areas can affect negotiations with trade unions. Therefore, while organizational policy may be similar, the implementation of the policy may be different. Complete standardization of HR policies and practices is impossible, and the following two quotations capture the difficulty of achieving universal consistency in negotiations with trade unions:

“Labor negotiations are a bit challenging. The union environment in subsidiaries is different from the parent company” (interview BGH, 18/9/15.)

TDF: “The ability to get some professional people from to some difficult terrain. Some have no competence as managers”(TDF interview, 2/8/15)

The third strategy, managers in the parent company must deal with several geographic areas. Consultation with certain key decision makers can be challenging as a result of geographic differences. Consequently, there are consequences to productivity. Although the advent of technology has enabled individuals to connect virtually, there is still a reliance on managers who are willing to make their face-to-face communication outside of business hours. Thus, individuals who are part of a virtual team or have national responsibilities need to remain flexible. An example of many managers handling the geographical differences described by two managers:

“This requires a bit of additional detail as a manager to coordinate certain people in subsidiaries but technology must have provided the means by which to do so” (interview JKM, 21/8/15)

SWD: “The challenges of work encountered are geographic barriers”, “North-Sulawesi is the most generous to work and willing to meetings at 9, 10 or 11 at night” (SWD interview, 15/9/15)

The company's subcultural strategy, dealing with sub-culture differences with corporate culture. Difficulties in handling different cultures are expressed by managers with the following quote:

“It is very difficult for them to adapt to the culture” (HSL Interview, 7/9/15)

“Day to day challenges of cultural work adjustment include individual integration of different cultures” (Interview of TTD, 20/8/15)

Given that employees are in a subsidiary, this challenge can be a daily challenge. The most visible cultural difference is the style of work. However, whether the execution of this task can provide services to customers or other employees, an understanding of the cultural nuances in subsidiaries will enable the subsidiaries to be successful.

Although it provides an understanding of the strategies used by the parent company, most of the current literature has two flaws. First, most studies look at issues in the individual structure of employees (Burbach and Royle, 2010). Second, most studies assume that organizations have the time and budget to develop a comprehensive repatriation program (Edwards & Rees, 2011; Littrell et al., 2006). Thus, this study examines the parent company, subsidiaries and individual employees of corporate culture strategies while considering the organization's realities within a certain timeframe and budget constraints. Instead of merely identifying corporate strategies and cultures, the study seeks to understand the practice of human resources nationally and how they implement the strategy.

In the parent structure, three strategic issues are identified. Strategic policies and practices in several HR locations. First, even though managers recognize that standardization applies to all is impossible, given the social, cultural, educational, religious, ethnic and economic differences, there is a desire to harmonize policies and practices between the parent and the subsidiary as best as possible. Strategic alignment of human resources can be done through forming partnerships with subsidiaries. There needs to be a deeper consultation to explore the agreement in facilitating the harmonization of policies and practices. Another approach that can be used to create better alignment is the rotation of managers and selected managers from subsidiaries so that they are able to develop a comprehensive mindset through on-the-job learning and development. Through the exposure of different situations, these leaders are in a better position to appreciate and understand what works and does not work in different locations. Given that the policies and practices of HR with the organizational environment, these findings agree with institutional theory (Sub and Kleiner, 2008).

Second relates to labor negotiations in subsidiaries. Given that different labor laws and practices in each region, some HR policies and practices need to be temporarily localized and others may need to be negotiated. The proposed consultation process for strategic alignment should also involve discussion of labor-management relationships. Mains and subsidiaries need to improve communication and knowledge exchange so that needs can be met. It is important for HR managers and other business managers to educate themselves about industrial relations and labor laws.

Third is to overcome geographical differences. Sometimes the parent and the subsidiary need to coordinate more closely to ensure time sensitive completion of the project on schedule and with the willingness to sacrifice personal time for work meetings either day or night. At the same time, it is important for managers to understand that individuals from different cultures may have slightly different attitudes to the Jakarta-Papua time difference). In this study, adopting a flexible attitude of time is seen as positive. Therefore, managers must have the competence to balance the need to complete their projects on a timely basis.

In the company's subcultural categories, the distinction between cultures presents its own strategy. Some managers in rotation to the parent changes as a result of the inability to adapt culture. Cultural differences can manifest as differences in work style and communication. Also, cultural differences can affect leadership styles, individual responsibilities and work in teams. While these findings are not new, these challenges are still experienced by many contemporary global managers, including HR managers. Ignoring these differences can lead to conflicts among employees. HR plays a role in facilitating the necessary cultural training. When special training needs to be provided (such as language training), through external training if internal training is not supported.

Leadership development is another area that requires serious attention by HR. A common reason why managers are rotated back to the parent company is because of their inability to adapt. Despite the emphasis in leadership and development training in colleges and universities (Roehling et al., 2005), normative institutional processes (or similarities as a result of professionalization of roles and occupations) are unclear in this study and may require more time to ease. Thus, proper selection and pre-deployment of culturally-rooted assignments is still required before rotating the work. A realistic job preview is also required during the training and development phase so that potential managers and their family members are prepared for a variety of circumstances, such as overtime at work. If possible, short-term tasks can be used initially to allow managers to have a sense of lifestyle. Individuals who

demonstrate talent, especially openness and adaptability, work in sub-cultural settings can be selected for further development before being rotated.

Conclusion

The findings in this study help HRD practitioners to understand how employees see diversity ranging from education, religion, ethnicity, to economics. It provides insights into the effects of individual, employment and organizational factors that are related to corporate culture strategies. Other than that. Dynamic business environment, this research can add knowledge of HR practitioners and managers to assist employees in the process of aligning corporate culture, corporate subcultures, and individual cultures on performance and career. We further conclude that individuals and organizations should take into account the importance of conformity between the individual context and the environment in the company's acquisition decisions. Therefore, management must assess various issues; Standardization of HR policies and procedures; Negotiation with unions in subsidiaries; And resolve communication conflicts due to geographical differences.

Thus, academics and practitioners need to execute strategies on corporate culture, subculture, and individual culture categories for a more thorough understanding of issues related to job rotation, work enrichment, to redesigning work. Although the existing literature has addressed the issues found in this study, current research shows the role of HR managers in implementing corporate culture across all business units' underneath. Thus, there are implications for HR managers, when considering issues to prioritize. Also, given that current research has examined 8 HR managers from various industries in Indonesia, further research can be considered how managers from other countries use the same or different corporate culture strategies, as many contemporary cultural studies have found a mix of cross-country convergence and divergences.

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